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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

Letter dated 24 April 1996 from the Chargé d'affaires, a.i., of the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights

I have the honour to transmit herewith a reply* to the letter of the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations Office at Geneva dated 9 April 1996 addressed to the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights "regarding the situation of Croats in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia", which was distributed as a document of the Commission (E/CN.4/1996/154), and to request you kindly to circulate it as a document of the fifty-second session of the Commission, under item 10.

(Signed): Miroslav MILOSEVIC
Chargé d'affaires, a.i.

* The annex is circulated in the language of submission only.

Annex

STATUS OF CROATS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

With reference to the letter the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Croatia to the United Nations Office at Geneva (E/CN.4/1996/154) addressed to the Chairman of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights dated 9 April 1996, I have the honour to draw your attention to the unfounded allegations, insinuations and untruths it contains concerning the situation of ethnic Croats in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

There are no separate territories in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, therefore, Srem and Backa are only geographical regions of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The claim that Vojvodina has never been a part of the Serbian State territory is pure fabrication: it joined Serbia in 1918 upon a decision of its Assembly (delegates were Serbs, Croats, Bunjevacs, Slovaks, Romanians, Ruthenians, Hungarians, etc.). As for Boka Kotorska, it is a geographical part of the Republic of Montenegro, which is a constitutional unit of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its two constituent Republics, Serbia and Montenegro, are States of all their respective citizens. By virtue of this, they can exercise their guaranteed constitutional rights. The quoted statement by Ms. Savovic that Croats "enjoy neither a minority status nor a national status" should be understood within that context. As all other citizens in a civil State, Croats in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are equal and, accordingly, not denied the basic human rights and freedoms.

The claims are unfounded that entire Croatian villages in Srem were forcibly cleansed of Croats (with no mention of the names of any villages).

There are no "pure Croat, Serb, Hungarian or others' villages" in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

No "forced mobilization" of Croats has been carried out in Serbia, but regular conscription, as laid down under the Constitution, covers all eligible citizens, as in any other country.

No war was waged against Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but, indeed, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina carried out unconstitutional and armed secession. It is a well-known fact that Croatia has been ethnically cleansed in the war most substantially: from over 580,000 Serbs in Croatia in 1991, their number has been reduced to below 100,000 at present.

The allegations that Croats are being dismissed from their jobs and exposed to harassment are unfounded. Not a single name of any damaged party is mentioned in the Croatian representative's letter.

The number of ethnic Croats mentioned in the letter of the Croatian representative considerably exceeds the 1991 population census, established at 74,808 Croats living in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

The allegation of "manipulating" the census is also unfounded. Under the Constitution, Bunjevci and Sokci are not "sub-ethnic" groups of Croats but citizens free to express their national affiliations. The fact that some Croats consider themselves Yugoslavs is not a result of any "problematic nationality relations", but a consequence of the above-mentioned freedom of expression in a civil State. There is no evidence at all that 45,000 Croats have been expelled from Serbia. The fact is that, under the 1991 census, some 18,000 citizens previously registered as Croats declared themselves as Bunjevci.

No political party is registered in Yugoslavia under the name of "Serbian Political Party". The allegation that 5,000 Croats abandoned the area under "terrorist pressure" between 1991 and 1995 is not supported by facts (names, dates, etc.).

Croats are free to use their language and alphabet, as stipulated under the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. The Serbo-Croat language is in official use, the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets being on a footing of equality in Serbia. The Croats have the following cultural and information institutions:

- The "Bunjevacko kolo" Croatian Cultural Centre, Subotica;
- The "Matija Gubec" Cultural-Educational Ensemble, Tavankut (District of Subotica);
- The "Jovanka Gabosac" cultural company, Martinci;
- The "Matija Gubec" Croat cultural-educational society, Ruma;
- The "Silvije Strahimir Kranjcevic" cultural-artistic company, Sombor;
- The "Backi Monostor" cultural-artistic ensemble, Sombor.

The "Bunjevac Home", an organization of Croats in Vojvodina, publishes a weekly, ZIG.

Since 1991, the Democratic Union of Croats in Vojvodina publishes the fortnightly "Voice of the Plain".

The internal affairs authorities have been doing their utmost to clarify the charges of any large-scale attack against Croats and not a single case has been registered; individual acts of crimes were either prevented or prosecuted. There is no evidence mentioned in the letter (name, place or date) proving that the "local police put Croats on trial and pronounce severe sentences out of any proportion."

The issue of citizenship is not related only to the Croats not born in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Not a single person has been dismissed from their jobs or lost their real estate owing to the expiry

of their personal documents with "their involuntary departure as the ultimate goal." It is well-known, however, that the citizens expelled from Croatia (some 400,000 Serbs among them), have no chance of returning to their homes.

The operations "Lightening" and "Storm" were not actions of "liberation of the occupied Croatian territories", but rather genocidal and, as such, denounced in all international forums. The generally deteriorating situation caused by the arrival of Serb refugees has not affected Croats alone. In fact, this deterioration originated in the humanitarian disaster following the exodus of the Serb people from Krajina in the aftermath of the Croat army aggression.

Just a few isolated cases of attacks on churches were registered and denounced, perpetrators prosecuted and the damage compensated. On the contrary, in the territory of Croatia, in the same period, 87 Orthodox churches and 40 parochial homes and other church facilities were razed and 152 churches and parochial homes demolished, while 80 priests fled or were expelled from Croatia.

Since education is collective, Croatian children are not isolated in schools, the question of nationality is not raised at all and teaching is carried out on the basis of the Ministry of Educations's curricula.

Allegations of prominent Croat's harassment at Mount Fruska Gora are false and unfounded. There are no obstacles to travel to Croatia. According to the information available, leaders of the Democratic Union of Vojvodina Croats travel frequently, to Croatia and back, without any problem.

Along with all other citizens, Croats take part in the elections. It is well-known that at the City Assembly of Subotica, for example, the Croat-Hungarian coalition has a majority and that Croats have their representative at the Assembly of Vojvodina. There is no satanization of any national group in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Having in mind the well known fact that Croatia is among the ethnically purest States and that three heinous genocides of Serbs and other people (Jews, Gypsies, etc.) have been committed in this century alone, the Croatian representative's accusation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for "ethnic cleansing and genocide" is very cynical indeed.